DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 161 496 JC 780 575

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TITLE Grading Policies of the Public Two-Year Community Colleges in Michigan, Fall 1977.
INSTITUTION Macomb County Community Coll., Warren, Mich.
PUB DATE 10 Feb 78
NOTE 19p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Failure; Administrative Policy; Community Colleges; Credit No Credit Grading; Credits; Grade Point Average; *Grades (Scholastic); *Grading; *Junior Colleges; Pass Fail Grading; Student Evaluation

ABSTRACT

An examination of the grading policies at the 29 Michigan community colleges is presented. Six major classifications cover all grades given at the colleges: main grading system, pass-fail grades, withdrawal grades, incomplete grades, and audit options. The most common grade policy, used by 24 of the colleges, is the five grade system assigning both a letter and a number of honor or grade points to each grade. One college records only passing grades and does not assign any grade point value. Four colleges use variations of the honor point system which allow more distinctions within the range of excellent to failing, i.e., the decimal grade system (4.0, 3.5, 3.0, etc.) and the twelve point system (A+ 12, A 11, A- 10, etc.). Several schools, in addition to the grade point system, have a second system where the student receives simply a mark of pass or fail. Seventeen colleges distinguish between a withdrawal made while the student is passing and one made while the student is failing. At seven schools the student who withdraws while failing is penalized by having those credit hours calculated in the GPA as if the course were failed. All the colleges have an incomplete grade though they differ in the time allotted for resolution of the incomplete. All but six colleges mention a system whereby a student can audit a class. State legislation requiring the reporting of student credit hours is also discussed. (MB)

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MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Grading Policies of the Public Two-Year Community Colleges in Michigan, Fall 1977

Department of Research

JC 780 575

MACOMB COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH

GRADING POLICIES OF THE PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN MICHIGAN, FALL 1977

Project No. 78027
February 10, 1978
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INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared at the request of the Presidential Staff. It is an examination of grading policies at the twenty-nine community colleges in Michigan. These grading policies vary widely among the colleges and no two schools in the state use an identical system. However, six major classifications cover all grades given at these community colleges: main grading systems, pass-fail grades, withdrawal grades, incomplete grades, audit options and marks unique to one or two schools. (The latter two classifications are both explained in Section 5.)

A brief examination of Macomb's grading policy in relation to that of other schools shows that Macomb generally uses the system that is most popular. Only regarding withdrawals does Macomb side with an apparent minority, yet the majority is split into factions which are actually quite diverse in opinion. (See Section 3 for a more complete description).

SECTION 1

MAIN GRADING SYSTEMS

The most common grade policy at Michigan community colleges is the five grade system assigning both a letter and a number of honor or grade points to each grade (see Table 1). The points are then averaged by multiplying the number of credit hours times the number of hours for each course, adding the subtotals for each course, and dividing by the total number of hours attempted by the student to arrive at the grade point average (also known as honor point average and credit point ratio).

TABLE 1

FIVE GRADE SYSTEM

Letter	Typical Meanings	No. of honor/grade points
A	Superior, excellent, outstanding	4
B	Good, above average, highly satisfactory	3
C	Fair, average, satisfactory	2
D	Poor, below average, unsatisfactory with credit, inferior, deficient	1
E or F	Failure, not passed	0

This system is used in 24 of the 29 community colleges in the state, although at Kellogg Community College, an "N" is assigned in lieu of an "E" and is not figured in the grade point average.

Wayne County Community College records only passing grades and does not assign any honor or grade point value. Kalamazoo Valley, Northwestern Michigan, Jackson, and Montcalm use a variation of the honor point system which allows more distinctions within the range of excellent to failing. The first three do not assign letter values but use the number 4.0, 3.5, 3.0, 2.5, 2.0, 1.5, 1.0 and 0.0. This system will be referred to as the Decimal Grade System for the purpose of this report. Whole numbers are roughly equivalent to the grades of A, B, C, D, and E in the more widely used system. Montcalm's system, referred to here as the Twelve Point System, assigns the letter values and corresponding grade point values of A+ (12), A (11), A- (10), B+ (9), B (8), B- (7), C+ (6), C (5), C- (4), D+ (3), D (2), D- (1), and E (0). The letters correspond roughly to the letter grades of the Five Grade System.

TABLE 2

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE MAIN GRADING SYSTEM POLICIES

A. No Grade Point System

Wayne

B. Twelve Point System

Montcalm

C. Decimal Grade System (No letters used)

Jackson
Kalamazoo Valley
Northwestern Michigan

D. Five Grade System

All others

SECTION 2

PASS - FAIL GRADING SYSTEMS

Several schools, in addition to the grade point system, have a second system where the student receives simply a mark of pass or fail (in some schools, satisfactory or unsatisfactory). This is used in two ways. At five schools, the pass - fail markings are an option so that the student may take one or more courses without affecting his or her grade point average. At seven schools, the pass - fail marks are the standard grading policy for particular courses. These grades also have no affect on grade point averages. Monroe County Community College uses both systems.

TABLE 3

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

PASS - FAIL GRADING SYSTEM POLICIES

A. Pass - Fail Option

Alpena	Lake Michigan
Delta	Monroe
Glen Oaks	

B. Pass - Fail in Specified Courses

C. S. Mott	North Central
Henry Ford	Northwestern Michigan
Monroe	Washtenaw
Muskegon	

C. No Pass - Fail Grades

All others

SECTION 3

POLICIES REGARDING WITHDRAWALS

The policies of Michigan community colleges regarding withdrawals differ with respect to how they are recorded, and whether or not they carry a penalty by being calculated as an "E" in the grade point average.

Seventeen community colleges distinguish between a withdrawal made while the student is passing and one made while the student is failing. At ten of these, the grade is merely recorded as withdrawal passing or withdrawal failing. Two of the ten also have a non-distinctive grade for students who withdraw without judgment. However, at seven schools, the student who withdraws while failing is penalized by having those credit hours calculated in the grade point average as if the course was failed. The remaining twelve schools do not grade with a distinction between withdrawing while passing or while failing.

TABLE 4

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE POLICIES FOR WITHDRAWALS

I. No Distinction Between Withdrawal Passing and Withdrawal Failing

C. S. Mott	Monroe
Henry Ford	North Central
Highland Park	St. Clair
Kalamazoo Valley	Washtenaw
Kellogg	Wayne
MACOMB (No WF)	Westshore

II. Distinction Between Withdrawal Passing and Withdrawal Failing

A. Distinction merely recorded

Alpena	Montcalm
Glen Oaks	Oakland
Jackson	Schoolcraft
Mid-Michigan	Southwestern Michigan

B. Either a distinguishing or non-distinguishing mark given at the instructor's discretion

Delta
Gogebic

C. A withdrawal failing calculated as an "E" in the grade point average

Bay de Noc	Lansing
Grand Rapids	Muskegon
Kirtland	Northwestern Michigan
Lake Michigan	

SECTION 4

POLICIES REGARDING INCOMPLETES

All of the community colleges have an incomplete grade (usually abbreviated as "I"). Two major differences exist in policies on incomplete grades: the time allotted for resolution of the incomplete and the final grade listed on the transcript if the incomplete is not resolved. At seven colleges, students must resolve the incomplete well before the next term ends. Ten schools require the incomplete to be resolved by the end of the next full term and two require its resolution by the end of the next term the student attends. Five allow more than one term and six allow for an indefinite contract between the instructor and the student.

If the incomplete is not resolved within the specified period, a majority of the schools record it as an "E" and it is figured that way in the grade point average. However, at eleven community colleges, the incomplete either remains an "I" or becomes a withdrawl passing at the end of the allotted period, so that there is no penalty for failing to resolve an incomplete.

TABLE 5

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE POLICIES FOR INCOMPLETES

I. Time Length For Resolution Of an Incomplete

A. Less than one term

Grand Rapids (before the start of the next semester)
Henry Ford (mid-semester of next full semester)
Jackson (2 months)
Kellogg (30 days)
Kirtland (6 weeks)
Northwestern Michigan (90 days)
Schoolcraft (mid-semester of next full semester)

B. By the end of the next full term

Highland Park	Muskegon
Kalamazoo Valley	North Central
Lake Michigan	St. Clair
MACOMB	Southwestern Michigan
Monroe	Westshore

C. By the end of the next term the student attends

Alpena
Lansing

D. More than one term

Bay de Noc (1 year)
C. S. Mott (1 year)
Glen Oaks (2 semesters)
Oakland (20 weeks)

E. Student has an indefinite time set forth in a teacher - student contract

Delta	Montcalm
Gogebic	Washtenaw
Mid-Michigan	Wayne

TABLE 5 (Continued)

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE POLICIES FOR INCOMPLETES

II. Grade Of an Unresolved Incomplete

A. Remains "I" (incomplete) or coverts to "WP" (Withdrawal Passing)

Bay de Noc	Oakland
Glen Oaks	St. Clair
Kalamazoo Valley	Schoolcraft
Lansing	Washtenaw
Montcalm	Wayne

B. Grade becomes an "E" or instructor assigns grade on basis of work completed in relation to course requirements.

All others

SECTION 5

AUDIT OPTIONS AND OTHER MARKS

All but six community colleges mention a system whereby a student can audit a class: attend a class but not be responsible for tests and assignments. No credit is received for auditing, and it does not affect the grade point average.

Eight schools use some grade that is not in common usage at other schools. Three have a grade for non-attendance: Washtenaw uses an "N" to signify a student has not attended the class sufficiently to receive credit, and Gogebic and Grand Rapids use the mark of "X" to designate students who were absent from the final examination. Muskegon has a system of designating withdrawals which allows for a reason for the withdrawal, as well as a mark for community service courses. Monroe also has a special system for its non-degree non-credit classes. A student receives a "Y" if a certificate was awarded and a "Z" if it was not. Montcalm designates credits which are not recommended for transfer by an "N". Finally, Mid-Michigan uses a "Z" grade to indicate late-starting classes which are still in progress when grades are issued. The "Z" grade is changed after the course is finished.

TABLE 6

MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE AUDIT OPTION POLICIES

A. Community Colleges not mentioning an audit option

Alpena	Lake Michigan
Bay de Noc	North Central
Highland Park	Wayne

B. Community Colleges offering an audit option

All others

TABLE 7

OTHER MARKING SYSTEMS AT MICHIGAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

A. Grade for insufficient attendance

Washtenaw

B. Grade for absence from final exam

Gogebic
Grand Rapids

C. System for designating reason for withdrawal

Muskegon

D. Non-degree/non-credit course grades

Muskegon
Monroe

E. Designation for credits not recommended for transfer

Montcalm

F. Designation for late-starting classes

Mid-Michigan

CONCLUSION

Section 23 of Act No. 97, Public Acts of 1977, approved by the Governor August 4, 1977, requires a community college to ". . . report to the senate and house fiscal agencies. . . the number of dropped, failed, and incomplete student credit hours compared to the total student credit hours for the fall term of 1977. . . ."

From this study one may conclude:

1. "Dropped" credit hours will generally be those known in schools as withdrawals of one or another kind.
2. "Failed" credit hours are identified easily. Even at Kellogg Community College, where an explicit failing grade does not exist, an "N" (representing no grade) can have no other meaning but failure.
3. Every school allows incomplete student credit hours.
4. Every school, consequently, should have filed with the fiscal agencies a report on the student credit hours it had in Fall 1977 in each category.
5. The details of grading systems vary widely. No two schools have exactly the same policy.
6. Given that within a school instructors may vary widely in assigning grades, the significance of the reports going to the State from the staffs in 29 community colleges will be difficult to determine.

7. Whatever is reported to the State can have little meaning unless it can be compared with similar grades, particularly those issued to freshman and sophomores, in four-year institutions. Such data does not exist, at least not in the files of the fiscal agencies since its collection has never be mandated.
8. There is no way to forecast from this study how public policy may be affected by the reports being submitted.
9. It is comforting to know that the grading policies at Macomb County Community College are generally those in use at plurality of the State's publicly supported two-year institutions.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The primary source of information on grading policies is the most recent college catalog available through Macomb County Community College's Admission's Office. If the dates covered by that catalog did not run through Fall 1977, the information was checked or amended by phone conversation with the appropriate office at the community college on February 2, 1978.

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